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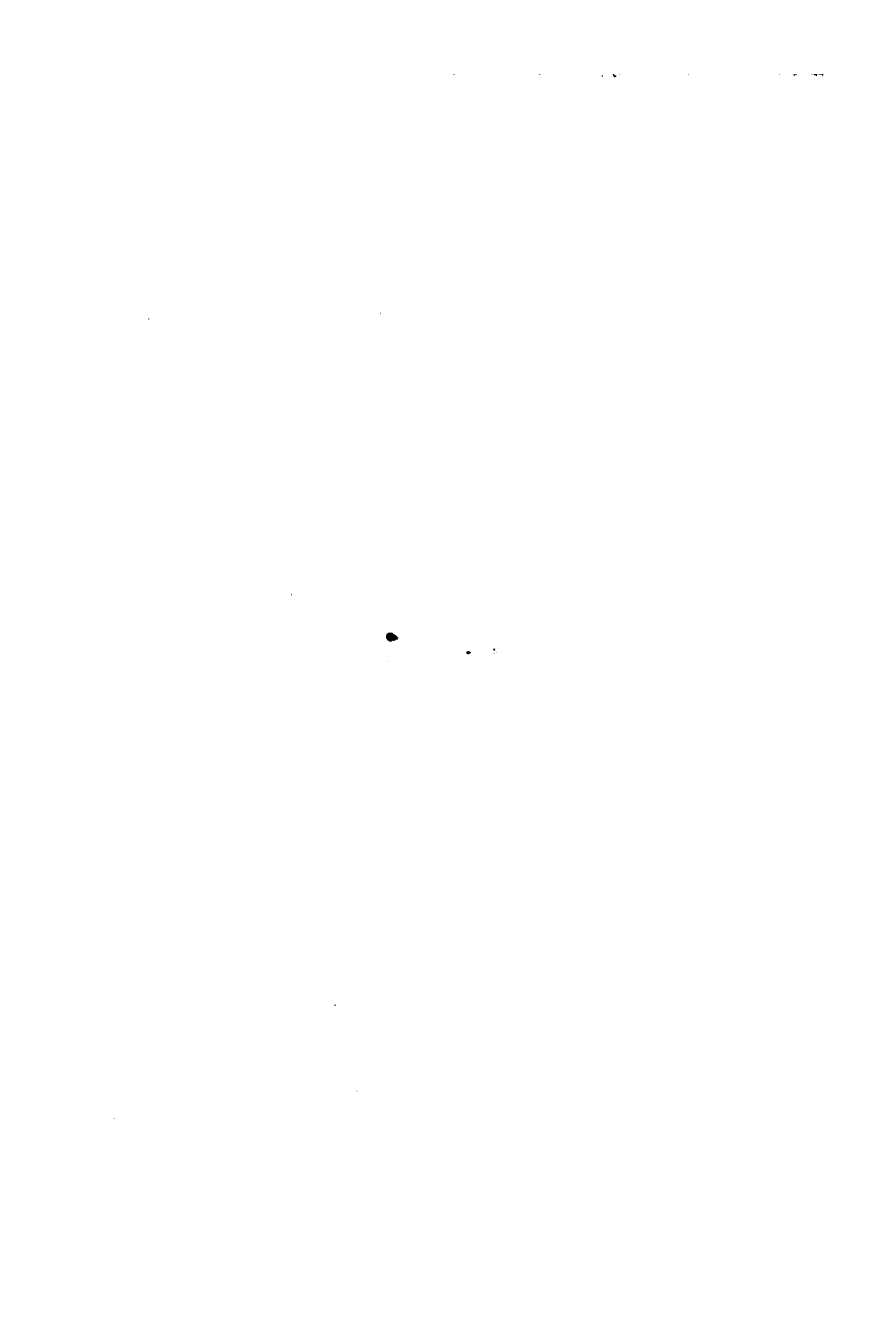
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PRIZE ESSAY,

ON THE

OCCASION OF THE

Society for Promoting Religious Knowledge
among the Poor,

ESTABLISHED THE 8TH OF AUGUST, 1750,

COMPLETING ITS FIRST CENTENARY.

RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE AMONG THE POOR, NOT
LESS IMPORTANT IN 1850 THAN 1750.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR THE SOCIETY.

DEPOSITORY, 19, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1850.



LONDON :
PRINTED BY J. O. CLARKE,
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PREFACE.

IN the history of any valuable institution, the propriety of marking, by some emphatic expression, the completion of the first centenary of its existence, can scarcely admit of a question.

“The Book Society for Promoting Religious Knowledge among the Poor,” in the near prospect of witnessing the completion of the hundredth year of its operations, determined, in celebrating the event, to offer TWENTY GUINEAS for a First Prize Essay; and for a Second, a donation of Books, of the value of ten pounds, from the Society’s catalogue; and, in adopting this course, the

Committee were much influenced by the following considerations :—

1. As affording an opportunity peculiarly favourable to survey the movements of that invisible Hand by whose secret but impulsive influence the honoured FOUNDERS of this institution were induced to unite in commencing so benevolent an enterprise, and by whose infinitely wise guidance and gracious support it has been conducted through its first centenary.

2. As presenting an occasion admirably adapted to bring under impartial review numerous incidents in the past history of the Society, the salutary tendency of which, it is hoped, may stimulate to increased exertions in seeking to promote Religious Knowledge among the Poor.

3. And as one further and powerful call to the pious of every denomination to come to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty ; and thus, by every scriptural and approved method, to assist in promoting the interest, extending the influence, and increasing the efficiency of an institution, the principal design of which is the glory of God, the advancement of his kingdom in the world, and the salvation of men.



Religious Knowledge
AMONG THE POOR.

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RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE

AMONG THE POOR,
NOT LESS IMPORTANT IN 1850
THAN IN 1750.

WITH AN ACCOUNT OF THE RISE, PROGRESS, AND
PRESENT STATE OF THE BOOK SOCIETY FOR
PROMOTING RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE
AMONG THE POOR.

By EDWIN OWEN JONES, Esq.

“ Πάντοτε γὰρ τοὺς πτωχοὺς ἔχετε μεθ’ ἑαυτῶν.”
“ For ye have the poor always with you.”—MATTHEW xxvi., 11.

LONDON :
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CONTENTS.

PART I.

THE ARGUMENT.

	PAGE
SECTION I.—The Essential Importance of Religious Knowledge	1
„ II.—Worldly Objections to its Diffusion Considered	7
„ III.—Objections of some Christians Considered	13
„ IV.—The Importance of its Diffusion among the Poor	31

PART II.

THE HISTORY.

	PAGE
SECTION I.—Revival of Evangelical Religion in the Eighteenth Century	43
„ II.—Institutions for the Diffusion of Religious Knowledge	66
„ III.—The Book Society for Promoting Religious Knowledge among the Poor .	80



PART I.

THE ARGUMENT.

SECTION I.

THE ESSENTIAL IMPORTANCE OF RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE.

It is an ever-present truth, that the mind is its own universe. To each conscious existence, the world is comprised in those two syllables, myself. Every spirit can say, Except through my own being, I have no idea of any other. Annihilate it, were it possible, and to me nothing remains. Destroy my happiness, and to me the happiness of the universe is no more. If I am miserable, the felicity of other existences will not alleviate my condition; in some circumstances it will only serve to aggravate my wretchedness. Now, that must be a condition of absolute misery, to which every mind, condemned to

everlasting perdition, will be eternally reduced. When a soul is lost, therefore, the happiness of a universe is destroyed. Its perdition is, to itself, the perdition of every thing beyond itself. Multiply the universe by the number of condemned spirits, and the failure of the attempt will give some faint idea of the ruin accomplished by their loss. No other process can afford an adequate conception of the infinite value of the human soul.

It is consolatory, however, to reflect, that though perdition be the ruin, religious knowledge is the remedy. By this we understand the Gospel, the literal meaning of which—good intelligence—supposes the existence of knowledge or information to be communicated. In the transgression of their first parents, the human race fell from the perfection originally assigned them by the Creator. They broke through his laws, and incurred the penalty which he had fitly attached to their infraction; for it is obvious that laws,

without penalty, would have no force whatever. At the same time, the great design of the creation of man was his everlasting happiness. The necessity of inflicting punishment interfered with this purpose of the Almighty ; yet even this could not place the Creator in that position which, among men, would be called a dilemma. He had foreseen the end from the beginning : from all eternity had the Everlasting Mind purposed so to conduct his administration, that the creature should be himself responsible for suffering the violation of the great end of his being. It was necessary to show that sin was so heinous, that its punishment could not be remitted, and therefore the Son of God was ordained to suffer ; it was necessary that the happiness of men should be secured, and therefore mankind, for the sake of his sufferings, were ordained to live. But in this part of the glorious scheme, the wisdom of God is again remarkably displayed. A condition is attached to the salvation of mankind. It is not the

whole human race that are to be redeemed because the Saviour has suffered, but those only who accept of his mediation. Faith in his testimony is the great means to a participation in the benefits of his salvation. There is no merit, however, in faith; it is obvious that there can be none in believing the word of Him who cannot lie. It is an instrument, but one admirably adapted to its end. From the very constitution of the human mind, the belief in kindness towards ourselves produces love to Him who extends it: that love will secure in us conformity to his wishes and desires, and a community of mind with his. Such are the results of faith—an exercise which consists in the reception of testimony or information; and testimony must be believed, if rightly attended to, where its evidences, as in the case of the Gospel, are sufficiently powerful. Faith is, therefore, an instrument within the reach of all who hear; and when we speak thus, we do not for a moment overlook the necessity for Divine in-

fluence, that being positively promised to every one who uses aright the means within his power. We see, then, the wisdom of God, in thus selecting belief as the instrument for bringing the salvation of Christ home to the case of fallen humanity. It secures to the Divine honor and glory, that heaven should be inhabited by an affectionate and an obedient, as well as a redeemed people ; and being within the reach of all to whom it is revealed, it leaves those without excuse who do not avail themselves of it, and vindicates the justice of God in their condemnation, even though Christ has died.

The Christian, again, is of all men the happiest ; and, for this reason, we should endeavour to bring our fellow-creatures under the influence of the Gospel. If earthly troubles surround the believer, he has a throne of mercy to which he may ever repair for " grace to help in time of need ;" and even if his requests be not directly accorded,

“the peace of God, which passeth all understanding,” will “keep his heart and mind through Christ Jesus,” and enable him to bear all his afflictions with a ready acquiescence. If spiritual blessings are required, he knows that a God, always faithful to his promises, is ever ready to bestow them. Other men have the same troubles of life to contend with, but without his abundant consolations. Other men have nothing before them but “a certain fearful looking-for of judgment and of fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries;” whilst he has the prospect of “an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for those who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time.” The moment of dissolution, so dreaded by others, is to him the moment of inexpressible triumph. “Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.” It is to this glorious end,

that the reception of religious knowledge, through the unbounded mercy of the eternal Jehovah, is the appropriate means. We can draw but one practical conclusion, next to that of receiving it ourselves, and that is, the imperative duty of diffusing amongst others "the glorious Gospel of the ever-blessed God." It is the same now as it was when first proclaimed,—the same as it was a hundred years ago ; and it will be ever the same, after ages upon ages have rolled away. Religious knowledge is "not for an age, but for all time."

SECTION II.

WORLDLY OBJECTIONS TO THE DIFFUSION OF RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE CONSIDERED.

THE preceding considerations ought to impress upon us the necessity of so urging the testimony of Christ, as to secure its willing acceptance. Hence the importance of the wide diffusion of religious knowledge ; not

less important at the present time, than it was in the century that has passed away. It will be proper, in pursuing this subject, to reply to some objections that are taken to the promulgation of religious knowledge generally, after which we shall endeavour to show why it is particularly necessary to promote its diffusion in the humbler walks of society.

The first class of objections are of a worldly character, and originate with those who take what is frequently called a wide and liberal (being, really, a deistical) view of the Divine administration. Whilst these persons acknowledge the existence and the government of a Supreme Being, as discerned in the works of Nature, they consider that the belief of the revelation contained in his written word, although in itself good and useful, is by no means essential to salvation. They hold that it is immaterial whether a man belong to one religious denomination or another, so long as by a calm, a philosophical,

and, it may be, an inoffensive life in this world, he merits the favor of the Almighty in the world to come. Whether a Christian or a Jew, a heathen or a Mussulman, a Catholic or a Protestant, they consider that sincerity in his opinions, however erroneous, will procure his acceptance in the sight of God. Such a doctrine naturally leads them to oppose all exertion for the evangelization of the world, as wasteful, worthless, and unnecessary. The same effort, thrown into the cause of merely social amelioration, they would consider far more usefully applied.

These, and similar opinions, are frequently enlarged upon by their advocates in a tone of such high philanthropy, that many, of sounder views, are often inclined to think that they rest, in some degree, on a true foundation. It is easy, however, to meet them, if we refer to one or two of the first principles of religious morality. Truth is one as God himself. No two diametrically opposite propositions can be equally and at

the same time true. The Almighty has revealed himself to men, both in nature, and in the Word of Inspiration. As he is a God of truth, anything opposed to the principles of his revelation must be error. Then, is error to exist with impunity? If the Great Being condescends to speak, who, through all eternity, controls the affairs of every world in an apparently infinite universe; can we suppose that his testimony is a matter, which, according to the taste, the fancy, or the prejudice of the individual to whom it comes, may, with equal propriety, be received as valuable, or thrown away as worthless? It would be absurd to entertain such a proposition, even for a moment. The revelation of God is not merely a body of information, put forth for the purpose of gratifying a thirst for knowledge; it is a law to be observed, (for the Gospel only perpetuates moral obligation), in order to promote the present and the future well-being of mankind. That cannot be called a law,

the observance of which is not imperative; nor does that deserve the name of a statute, which is not enforced by penal enactments. The reception and the diffusion of the Gospel cannot be regarded by the Almighty with indifference. We have the command of his own Son: "Go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." We have illustrations of obedience to that command in the history of the apostles, who, instead of being satisfied with the ignorant sincerity of the world around them, went out for the purpose of proclaiming a system which denounced its every vice and its every pleasure; and who, by so doing, concentrated all kinds of persecution on their own heads, until it led them, at last, to torture and to death. If they were not convinced of the vital importance of religious knowledge, their history is more surprising than the greatest miracle ever recorded. With this before us, let it not be said that God is satisfied with sincerity and nothing

more. Even the weakest of human governments never adopted such a principle. The Gunpowder Conspirators were sincere in their desire to execute what they considered the judgment of God against heretics, by destroying the Government at one blow; yet their sincerity had not the effect of saving them, on their discovery, from the strong arm of the law.

We may be told, again, that as the obedience of the creatures of God cannot secure the stability of his government, or increase his happiness, his administration may very properly be conducted upon principles of leniency that would be impracticable in human governments, whose security depends upon the loyalty and good order of their subjects. We do not see the force of this objection. That God has proclaimed a system for the happiness of his creatures, and not for his own, which cannot be added to, is the very reason why its acceptance should be obligatory, or the end of its diffusion is

lost. Sincerity is no substitute for enlightenment. The poor Hindoo, worshipping the Ganges with superstitious veneration, knows not the sources of delight that are open even to the least experienced of real Christians. "Life and immortality are brought to light through the Gospel," and where that is unknown, the whole creation may indeed be said to "groan and travail in pain together."

SECTION III.

OBJECTIONS OF SOME CHRISTIANS TO THE EXTENT OF
THE DIFFUSION OF RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE CONSIDERED.

APART from latitudinarian sentiments, we have another class of objections to contend with, urged against the diffusion of religious knowledge by Christians themselves. One of these is founded upon what are usually denominated high views of the doctrine of predestination. It is said that God has seen the end from the beginning, and has chosen his believing people from all eternity, who

must therefore be everlastingly saved ; whilst all others will for ever be condemned, notwithstanding every human effort to the contrary ; so that preaching to sinners cannot be of any possible avail. Now the inferences, deduced from these premises, are palpably erroneous. It is true that believers are chosen by God from all eternity, and that he has for ever known who will and who will not accept the salvation he has proclaimed ; but it is also true that he has not ordained any to everlasting life, without ordaining also the instrumentality by which they attain it ; and amongst the instruments to this end, the preaching of the Gospel has always been the most effectual. It has pleased God, we are told, "by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe." The means are as much a part of the Divine plan as the end. The Almighty acts upon the same principle in the administration of the ordinary affairs of mankind. He has ordained to each his time of continuance

upon earth, but has not ordained that continuance apart from the use of food and drink, and other means necessary for the support of life and health. These are so constantly regarded as means to that end, that not even the highest predestinarian would think of doing without them. We regard this objection to the diffusion of religious knowledge in a fallen world as a very serious error, and would rather say with an inspired writer, "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand, for thou knowest not which shall prosper, whether this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good."

There are real Christians, again, who insist, as a duty, upon the promulgation of the great outlines of the Evangelical system, which they denominate "the simple truths of the Gospel," but object, on grounds of practical utility, to the filling up of those outlines. Such opinions militate very seriously against the extent to which attain-

ments in religious knowledge ought to be cultivated. They are condemned by the inspired author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, who tells us, that "leaving the principles of the Gospel of Christ," we are to "go on unto perfection." We are often told, however, in the words of the same apostle misapplied, that "knowledge puffeth up, but love edifieth," and that the great thing to be cultivated, if we would make progress in Christian experience, is the heart rather than the head, the affections rather than the understanding. From this it is inferred, that seriously to inquire into anything beyond the leading doctrines of Christianity, is to meddle with things too high for us, and with which, moreover, we have no practical concern.

If we investigate the manner in which truth is brought home to the heart, we shall at once see the futility of such objections. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." That is, faith is the re-

ception of information, of which the Scriptures are the depository: and to study the Scriptures, in their length and breadth, is the duty, as well as the privilege, of every Christian. "Search the Scriptures," were the words of the Redeemer. The first disciples at Berea, because they fulfilled this injunction, have been recorded for all time on the page of inspiration, as Heaven's own nobility, for an encouragement to ourselves to go and do likewise. The more we know of the contents of the Word of God, the more must we love its Great Author. The more we discern of his wisdom, the more shall we be filled with a holy attachment to the principles of his government. The love of God is an enlightened affection, not a blind impulse: the heart is reached through the medium of the understanding.

It is, again, objected to an enlarged study of the Scriptures, that, as they require us to believe many things we cannot understand, it is useless, upon these points, to in-

investigate them further. Now we decidedly demur, at the outset, to this form of asserting the proposition. There is not a mind in existence that believes what it cannot understand. It would cease to be a mind, if this were possible. Faith, as we have before observed, is the reception of information; but if we do not understand the communication, we cannot say that any information has been received. To affirm that the Almighty requires belief under such circumstances, is to imply that he who gave mind its laws, has not revealed himself to it in accordance with them. This, however, is not intended by the objectors we refer to, and it is only just to them to admit it. They mean that the Scriptures reveal many things for our belief, that *imply the existence* of other things not revealed, and which, for that reason, we do not understand. These, however, we cannot be said, with truth, either to believe or disbelieve, because it is impossible for any mind to assent to, or dis-

sent from, anything of which it is completely ignorant.

Let us select an illustration. The discoveries of revelation being spiritual discoveries,, imply, of course, that spirit has an essence (of which we have also sufficient proof in the being of our own minds), but they reveal nothing on the subject. The essence of spirit, therefore, is a topic upon which we are completely ignorant, and consequently neither believe nor disbelieve anything. It is incomprehensible, and all investigations into the subject are entirely useless, because we have no ground on which to conduct them. But we may be told, that we believe in the existence of spirit. We do so; but the existence of spirit and its essence are totally different things. Existence is another subject altogether—another topic of belief. It is a simple idea, which we all understand, because it comes home to our every-day experience. But spirit itself we cannot understand, even though we are ourselves spirits.

We believe in existence, which is its attribute, and of which we are informed ; but we have neither belief nor disbelief regarding its nature, because of that we are not informed. We think this a fair illustration of many of the mysterious things taught by implication in the Word of God. We neither believe nor disbelieve them, because we have no information upon which either to rest our faith or withhold its exercise. It is also an illustration of the principles taught by Nature. Our belief, regarding the world of matter, is a belief in the attributes of that, of the essence of which we know absolutely nothing. Because such is the case, a distinguished philosopher once ventured to affirm, that matter had no existence whatever, except in our own ideas. If we had anything like a belief concerning its essence, no one could ever have offered such a theory.

Upon these principles, we think we are only asserting that which is consistent with the laws of mind and the principles of Di-

vine government, when we affirm, that it is impossible to believe what we do not understand. So far, we dissent from the form in which this objection is presented. The truth, moreover, which it does assert, namely, that the word of God *implies the existence* of things we cannot understand, is no valid reason for neglecting the thorough investigation of the Scriptures. The things that are revealed, and all of them, belong to ourselves and to our children. Yet this is frequently denied by the same class of objectors. Let us confine ourselves, it is said, to the doctrinal and practical parts of Scripture: what have we to do with the historical, ceremonial, and prophetical portions of the sacred writings? These may be matter for curious investigation, but cannot be of practical religious importance. Now, we emphatically dissent from such principles. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable," are the words of one who was himself divinely inspired. In whatever

manner the Almighty has condescended to speak, it does not become us to treat any part of his communication with disregard. The histories, the ceremonials, the prophecy of Scripture, abound with internal evidences of its Divine origin, the foundation upon which rests every principle of doctrine and of practice. We cannot, therefore, deem them unimportant, in a religious point of view. If the Bible were a ready-made creed of doctrine, or ritual of practice, there would not be the same evidence of authenticity as is afforded by a series of books, written at different periods in the history of one nation, and the principles of which we may reduce into doctrinal and practical for ourselves. This may be compared to a celestial ambassador, coming down to us with his credentials in his hand, and calling upon us, for our own satisfaction, to examine and test them, before we listen to his message. This course of condescension, on the part of the Almighty, is calculated to prevent a plausible

objection from being urged by the infidel, and to secure the admission of the evidences of revelation by every unprejudiced mind.

If we briefly review these comparatively neglected portions of Scripture, we discover that the history in the Book of Genesis supplies us with an account of the earliest ages of the world, of which we have no record elsewhere ; but which, when obtained, affords a key to many of the traditions of the heathen. The biography of the Patriarchs, moreover, is replete with instruction in the dealings of God with man. The Book of Exodus succeeds, and the wisdom and power of God are again remarkably manifested in the deliverance of the chosen nation ; and the depravity of the human heart strikingly illustrated in the frequent rebellion of that people against the Almighty hand that conducted them. From such a narrative we have everything to learn. The Books of the Law come next in order ; and what, it is often asked, have we to learn from the de-

tails of a dispensation which is described by an inspired apostle, as consisting "only in meats, and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, which were a shadow of things to come," of which the substance has long since been realized? We reply, that these ordinances were thus spoken of by the apostle, only in reference to the efforts of some who endeavoured to retain them, at a period when, their design having been fulfilled, their observance was useless. He did not mean to say, that we should be unable to learn anything from them, as they were rightly applied during the period of their continuance. On the contrary, the rites and ceremonies of the law of Moses are a most extraordinary manifestation of the wisdom of God in adapting means to an end; and, as such, a remarkable evidence of the fact that they really had a Divine origin. The end was the separation of the nation of Israel from all other nations of the world, in order that the knowledge of the true God might

be preserved amongst them, preparatory to the revelation, in the fulness of time, of the Gospel economy. Every sacrifice, every offering, every ablution, was a means to the accomplishment of this magnificent design—a link in the golden chain that thus wonderfully connected earth with heaven. The more of these ordinances, the more was their object rendered certain of being carried out. Their detail, therefore, only increases our admiration of the vast skill of the Creator, in adapting his commandments to the well-being of those whom they were designed to influence; whilst the frequent repetition of that detail exhibits his accurate knowledge of the waywardness and forgetfulness of man in his fallen condition, which rendered such repetition absolutely necessary. The minute details of the law also serve to answer another purpose; that of affording a strong internal evidence of its truth; for if Moses had been an impostor, these minutiae would never have been in-

served: such are overlooked by writers of fiction. But not only does the Law contain ceremonial, it contains also civil enactments in the rules of that Theocracy by which Israel was governed. Here we have another evidence of the Divine wisdom. It is a principle in the science of human politics, that governments are not made, but grow. Yet the law of Moses presents us with the unique spectacle of a system of government completed at once: an efficient administration, such as human minds could only have attained by the experience of ages, brought to bear, as soon as formed, upon all the varying circumstances of a newly organized people. Nothing can afford a stronger proof of the Divine legation of Moses. The leader of an uncivilized nomadic tribe, himself educated in a despotic court, could never have spontaneously devised such a science of government.

It is needless for us now to advert to the moral principles contained in the law of the

old dispensation. Their value is always admitted, even by those whose views in other respects we have been controverting. We pass on, therefore, to the historical portions of the Old Testament, the importance of which is too frequently overlooked. These contain many practical illustrations of the evil of forsaking the commandments of the Lord, and of the well-being of those who fear and obey him. The inference may not always be drawn for us in the narrative; the facts of inspiration are not, like the fictions of mankind, written "to point a moral, or adorn a tale;" but as we have had the law already, it is a salutary exercise for our own minds to reason from the narrative to its breach or its observance. The devotional and poetical books that follow the historical in the canon of inspiration, have been admitted by all to be of the highest importance, and so have the Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament; but of the prophetic books it is often affirmed, that

as they contain many things yet unfulfilled, an investigation into their details is unprofitable and useless. The reply to this is contained in a passage* of the Apocalypse, (the book generally considered most difficult,) which pronounces a blessing on him who reads and they who hear and keep the things written therein. Upon the authority of inspiration, therefore, we are bound to study the word of prophecy. If we avoid the investigation of the predictions yet unfulfilled, we shall be unable to identify them when they do come to pass. In those already accomplished, we have a sure foundation upon which to rest the evidences of the truth of revelation. The one instance of the coming Messiah in the Book of Daniel, which so remarkably identifies our Saviour as its fulfilment, is a most striking example of that "sure word of prophecy, whereunto we do well that we take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place."

* Revelations i. 3.

We trust we have said enough to prove, that every branch of religious knowledge, contained in the Word of God, should be at all times the inheritance of his creatures, and ought to be at all times diffused amongst them. It is frequently said, that Christians among the uneducated and the ill-informed, exemplify, in the highest degree, the spirituality of evangelical religion. This may be true; but those who are high in spiritual attainments must also be high in their degree of spiritual knowledge. It is their ignorance in the acquirements of this world, that has been mistakenly imagined to imply want of information in theology. There is no religion in ignorance: there can be no attainment in belief without a proportionate attainment in knowledge to be believed; neither can there be advancement in love, without an equal degree of advancement in faith.

Now the highest exercise of love to God, as practically exemplified, is the communica-

tion of religious knowledge to those who are yet unacquainted with it. Its diffusion is necessary for two reasons: first, in order to the salvation of the soul, the immeasurable value of which we have already attempted to consider; and secondly, in order to secure the regeneration and sanctification of society upon earth, which is the other great end of the Gospel. It is for this reason that the man who only repents in a dying hour, even if saved for eternity, is altogether lost as to time. We have, therefore, to induce mankind to glorify God in their lives upon earth, as well as to prepare for meeting him in heaven. To this end we ought to labor in every department of religious information. We must, in the first instance, diffuse the great outlines of the Gospel, and to do even this efficiently, we must be well versed in its higher attainments. It is the artist that can complete a picture, who is best qualified to execute a cartoon. But having done this, we must proceed to fill up the outlines, and

insist upon proficiency in religion, just as we require proficiency in any secular pursuit. Never will the value of religion in the present life be completely understood, until this world is no more, and its moral inhabitants are collected before the great white throne, from which the earth and the heaven shall flee away, and there shall be found no place for them.

SECTION IV.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DIFFUSING RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE AMONG THE POOR.

WHEN John the Baptist was in captivity, some doubt appears to have arisen, either in his own mind, or in the minds of those around him, as to whether Jesus were really the Messiah promised to the fathers, or only, like himself, a prophet of the Lord. He put the direct question, through two of his disciples, to the Redeemer. The reply he received was worthy of the genius and spirit of Chris-

tianity :—" Go and show John the things which ye do hear and see. The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear ; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them."

We have already shown, that all souls are alike valuable in the sight of the Almighty. Their condition in time, avails nothing, when viewed in the light of eternity. The reason why the Redeemer commenced his labors among the poor, may not, therefore, be obvious. We are ready to ask, Why did he not address himself to the rich, the mighty, and the noble ; and having commanded their faith and obedience, send them forth to diffuse his principles over society, with all the weight which their station might attach to their example ? The answer will suggest itself, upon reflection. Had he prevailed, in the first instance, with the powerful of this world, the infidel would have been in possession for all time of an unanswerable argu-

ment against the truth of Christianity—namely, that as its success was to be ascribed solely to the influence of the mighty, it afforded no proof of its intrinsic value. Even as it is, there have not been wanting those who have denounced Christianity as a system devised by tyranny and priestcraft, to subdue the rising power of the people. They have founded their objections upon the superstition of the middle ages, during which period it is unquestionable, that merely nominal Christianity was thus basely employed by those who were ignorant of the Gospel in its power. But if real Christianity had been advanced by such means, we should look in vain for a reply to these objections. Had we no period of light preceding that of darkness, Christianity would have no higher claim to our belief than the religion of Islam. If Christ had begun his mission with the kings and mighty men of the earth, they would no doubt have endeavoured to advance his cause by political power, and at the point

of the sword. The world would have been at once involved in a crusade. The simplicity, the purity, the spirituality of the Gospel would have been lost, or rather, would never have been known.

Now, the course which the Redeemer actually did pursue, was exactly calculated to display all the excellencies of his system. Beginning with the poor and the oppressed, He inculcated upon them a spirit of submission and meekness. He counted those happy who endured. Although the nation of Israel was looking for a temporal deliverer, and anxiously desiring to free itself from a foreign yoke, we never find Him uttering a single word at all calculated to minister to what might have been called the spirit of Jewish patriotism. He preached repentance, because the kingdom of heaven was at hand. He selected others to preach the same doctrines ; but these were not the illustrious or the wealthy—the most highly favoured being poor fishermen of Galilee. A poor man

himself, as to his outward circumstances, not having "where to lay his head," he selected poor men as his missionaries to preach the Gospel to the poor. He ascended to heaven; and in the course of a comparatively few years the principles of Christianity worked so far amongst the masses of society, that they overturned the Paganism, which had for ages been the religion of the civilized world. An extraordinary victory this, for a system unsustained by human authority and human power; but which only serves to prove that it was verily and indeed of Divine origin. It was not until worldly glory had been invoked in its behalf, and the sword had been drawn in its favour, that it lost its spiritual character; and humanly speaking, would have disappeared in the darkness of the middle ages, had not the Reformation of the sixteenth century restored it to something much nearer its primitive simplicity, by the use of the same means through which it had been originally established,

namely, the enlightenment of the disregarded and despised in the social community.

All great moral and social ameliorations have invariably arisen in the masses of the people. This is another reason why the poor were selected as the primary objects of the Redeemer's mission. Their selection, moreover, affords one of the many proofs we possess of his vast knowledge of human nature, and consequently of his essential superiority to that nature. The lower classes have always been more accessible than the higher, to the influence of a new order of things. They have not the same interests at stake; they have not the same spirit of adherence to the existing condition of society; they have not the same prejudices of education. To be assured of this fact, we have only to read history, and to observe the workings of men and things around us. It is true that the masses of the people are frequently the victims of a

demagogue; but it is equally true that with them also the wise man will commence his labours.

In the instance of the Redeemer, again, there were yet other circumstances which rendered his labours amongst these classes the more strikingly appropriate. It was necessary he should establish the divinity of his mission by miracles: it was in harmony with the benevolence of his character that these should be instrumental in relieving the sick and the afflicted; and such were to be found in the greatest abundance among the poor. His kindred according to the flesh, though well descended, were in humble circumstances; and it was only suitable that he should commence his instructions with that sphere of society in which he was himself placed. In all these things, we discern congruity as well as wisdom—a remarkable appropriateness in the fact, that the poor had the Gospel preached to them.

It was, as we have seen, to afford a substantial proof of the Divine origin of the Gospel, that God chose "the foolish things of this world to confound the wise, and the weak to confound the mighty, and things that are not, to bring to nought things that are." It was, as an inspired apostle tells us, "that no flesh should glory in his presence ;" that none should be able to say that the Gospel triumphed through human craft and worldly policy. But, in addressing itself first to the poor, we discern in the economy of the Gospel yet another peculiar propriety. The world has fewer allurements for them than it has for the wealthy. It does not appear in all its false magnificence to the man whose life is one incessant toil for his daily bread. A system that brings life and immortality to light, and opens the way to mansions in the skies, is far more calculated to tell upon the humble cottager than on one who dwells in a mansion upon earth. The wealthy man, or even the man who possesses

no more than a competence, has many enjoyments in this world that so far alleviate its sorrows as frequently to tempt him to take up with it, and to go no further. But, to the poor man, the world is one continued scene of toil and strife, of hardship, trouble, and anxiety. He is, therefore, far more likely to be influenced by the things that belong to another and a better state of existence. Moreover, "godliness has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come;" and the force of this truth will be most keenly felt by the man whose present life is one of suffering. Let us not be supposed to mean that religion can, by any possibility, be more valuable to one human being than to another. It is equally to all "the one thing needful;" but its vital necessity will be the more readily discerned by those who behold the world as a spectacle of misery, stripped of the fictitious adornments that conceal its true character from others.

We have seen that Christ preached the Gospel to the poor ; that this was consistent with the principles of his kingdom ; and further, that it was consistent also with high moral expediency, great revolutions having always commenced among the masses of society, and the temporal condition of the poor being calculated to render them more sensible than others of the value of religion in a present world, and consequently more accessible to its counsels and its influence. The Christian desires the evangelization of society, and the readiest means is by commencing with its humbler classes. The statesman desires a peaceable and a happy population ; and nothing can be better calculated to secure this end than the diffusion amongst them of the truths of Christianity. "The poor ye have always with you," said the Saviour, reminding his church of a field of usefulness open to all time. Let us then labour continually in that field. If the poor are more open than the wealthy to the teach-

ing of religion, and more accessible to our influence, we must never forget that they are destitute of the same means of self-improvement. This, in itself, constitutes a high claim upon Christian benevolence. The Redeemer is said to have left us an example, that we should follow his steps. Let us, then, without neglecting the spiritual interests of the more affluent, whom neither did he neglect, imitate him in preaching the gospel to the poor.

It would be superfluous to add more. We have hitherto endeavoured to prove that religious knowledge among the poor is as essential now as it was a century ago ; and that for two reasons, which the onward progress of time can never invalidate, namely—the absolute necessity of religion to the happiness of all mankind, and the peculiar advantages of, and facilities for, its diffusion amongst the poorer classes of society. It now remains for us to give a rapid sketch of the efforts that have been made for its exten-

sion, and especially those of the particular Society, the claims and usefulness of which it is the object of this Essay to bring before the public.

PART II.

THE HISTORY.

SECTION I.

REVIVAL OF EVANGELICAL RELIGION IN ENGLAND DURING
THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

THE history of religion, in all ages of the world, presents the same spectacle of revival and decay. God revealed himself to Adam ; but the descendants of Adam forsook the knowledge of His name, and filled the earth with violence. A flood upon the world of the ungodly, from which only eight persons escaped, was at once the just punishment and the necessary remedy of this awful apostacy. The patriarchal dispensation was then entrusted to Noah and his descendants ; but again we find the world turning away from God, and giving themselves up to vile idolatry. The Jewish economy was next re-

vealed, designed to rescue at least one nation from the prevailing superstition, and to preserve to all generations, the knowledge of the Messiah promised to the fathers. Yet the people for whom this economy was designed, frequently fell away from its principles; and when, in the fulness of time, the Redeemer did appear, they had so far made void the word of God by their tradition, that instead of recognising him as the Christ, they put him to death as a common malefactor.

The doctrines of our Saviour, however, and the atonement he offered, brought life and immortality to light; and if "his own received him not," "to as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God." The Gospèl, preached by his disciples in all the countries of the then civilized world, found many who cordially received its glad tidings. The bright day of the apostles, however, was followed by the comparative twilight of the fathers, and to

that succeeded the long dark night of the middle ages. At last appeared the morning star of the Reformation, and, after the lapse of two centuries, the rising of its sun ushered in another day; though, from the mists and vapors which the night left behind, cloudy in comparison with the radiance of that which preceded it. This second day grew dark at noon. Religion, roused anew to spiritual life by the Reformation, again disappeared in a condition of death-like inactivity.

Such was the state of religion in England, ere the eighteenth century witnessed a new revival. In the pulpit, mere morality took the place of the vital truths of Christianity. The favourite doctrines of the preachers were the duty of obedience to the laws, of doing no harm to any one, and of regularly frequenting church, for the performance of which and similar proprieties, heaven was held out as the merited reward. The promulgators of these opinions, however (and

the preceding is no caricature), were not remarkable either for the virtue or even the harmlessness of their lives.

From this condition of error and delusion, the powerful preaching of John Wesley and George Whitefield at length aroused the public mind. Of really evangelical views and of fervent zeal—often prevented from preaching the Gospel in the pulpits whence it had been so long excluded—these apostolic men proclaimed its glad tidings in the open air, to vast multitudes assembled beneath the broad canopy of heaven. Wesley took an Arminian, Whitefield a Calvinistic view of religious truth: the one organized a system of church government for his followers, the other adopted no organization whatever; yet both appear to have considered themselves ministers of the Established Church of England, in which they had been originally ordained. Although, for a few years, the diversity of their opinions occasioned something like an estrangement between

them, their intercourse was subsequently renewed; and it is certain that both these great and good men were actuated in all their proceedings by the same high motive—love to God and to the souls of mankind. Whitefield possessed the friendship of the Dowager Countess of Huntingdon, a member of the noble house of Ferrers; and by her munificence many chapels were founded in connection with evangelical doctrines, and a college endowed for the education of young men for the ministry. Dr. Hawies, the chaplain to this distinguished lady, was one of the first to call the attention of the religious public to the great cause of foreign missions.

The effects of the revival were soon felt within the pale of the Established Church. Men of evangelical religion rose to assert the claims of the Gospel. Newton and Cecil, both distinguished for their fervent piety, illumined the times in which they lived, and may be taken as types of others

of the same class. They were both, in the outset of their career, determined infidels. The Rev. John Newton had a pious mother, the memory of whose early instructions, even in his most hardened days, never seems to have been entirely effaced. She died while he was yet young; and his father being the master of a merchant vessel, his early life was spent in voyages with him to the Mediterranean. Such an employment afforded many temptations, and into these he fell, not, however, without experiencing the reproaches of the warning voice within. He subsequently entered the navy, and there adopted the infidel principles of one of his companions, who afterwards perished in a storm, from which Newton's own escape was signally providential. Still his day of repentance had not arrived. He deserted his vessel, was whipped, imprisoned, and degraded. At length he engaged in the slave trade on the coast of Africa, where the atrocities of his career seemed to have reached

their climax. It was on a homeward voyage from this coast, in a storm by which the ship had nearly perished, that a sense of his dangerous position before God first permanently impressed his mind. He renounced his infidel principles, laid aside his immoral habits, and appeared from that time a reformed character. By degrees, an experimental acquaintance with the truths of Christianity was vouchsafed to him: he became a new creature in Christ Jesus. A remarkable interposition of Providence removed him from the calling in which he was engaged. He entered into the ministry in connexion with the Church of England, wherein he proclaimed the evangelical doctrines of religion during the remainder of his life with unceasing assiduity;—Scott, the commentator, and Claudius Buchanan, so distinguished in the religious history of India, besides other eminent and useful men, being recorded among the fruits of his ministrations. His writings were not the least valu-

able portion of his labours. Among his friends he numbered John Thornton, the philanthropist, and William Cowper, the poet—two characters who, like himself, had a great moral influence on the times in which they lived. The elegant and truly evangelical poems of the latter (in conjunction with whom, Newton composed the Olney Hymns) have unquestionably diffused truth, where it would not otherwise have obtained an entrance. Mr. Newton died in 1807, at an advanced age, after a long career of usefulness.

The Rev. Richard Cecil, the biographer of Newton, and one of a kindred spirit, had, like his friend, the advantage in early life of the instructions of an eminently pious mother. These produced impressions which, in the midst of his subsequent dissipation, were never altogether lost. As he grew up, he devoted himself not only to the lawful pleasures of a present world, but to its licentious pursuits also. In order to go to any

length in these, he persuaded himself into the doctrines of scepticism : more than this, he exerted all his influence to bring others into the same way of thinking. In such doctrines, however, he found no lasting satisfaction ; and at the early age of twenty, we find him returning to the God from whom he had so deeply revolted. He subsequently became, not only an eminent Christian, but an eminently useful preacher ; and his ministrations at St. John's Chapel, Bedford Row, were made effectual to many by the same Spirit whose influence had reclaimed the minister.

Such characters as these were undoubtedly instruments in the Divine hand for the revival of religion, accomplished during the eighteenth century in England, and which was absolutely required by the lifeless condition of the Established Church. This has been so well expressed in later times by one of its ministers, in speaking of the Rev. John Newton, that we cannot do better than quote

his own words :—"The doctrines of Newton embraced all those great fundamental truths which distinguish the period of the Reformation, and were continued downwards to the times of Charles I., when an evident departure from sound doctrine is perceptible in the writers of that age, as well as in those which succeeded. We claim for Newton the praise of having been one, among a few faithful witnesses, who boldly proclaimed those truths when religion was degenerating, with some few exceptions, into a system of moral ethics. It is to such men as Romaine, Venn, Berridge, Milner, Walker of Truro, Adam of Wintringham, Stillingfleet, Jones of St. Saviour's, Newton, and a few others, that we owe that revival of piety which is now diffusing itself so generally among the members of our church." *

The name of the Rev. Rowland Hill may very properly be added to the list of those who were instrumental in giving a promi-

* Grimshawe, *Life and Works of Cowper*, vol. 8, p. 64.

nent place to the leading doctrines of the Gospel. Mr. Hill was educated for the Church of England; yet, although in many respects he continued to adhere to the practice of that body, he saw sufficient reason for casting in his lot with the Dissenters. Eccentric as he was in many points of his character, he appears to have been actuated in all things by the most ardent love to God and to the souls of men; and his memory will long be esteemed as one of the most devoted labourers in Christ's vineyard.

But not only did God raise up faithful ministers in all denominations, as his instruments for carrying out this great work of religious revival, but private Christians were also largely useful as means to the same end. Foremost among these, is the name of Mr. Wilberforce. This gentleman was born at Hull, in 1759, where his father, the descendant of an ancient Yorkshire family, was a merchant. At an early age, he derived his first religious impressions from the preaching

of George Whitefield. He received a college education at the University of Cambridge, where he formed an intimate friendship with Mr. Pitt, with whose political opinions his subsequent public life generally coincided, although his character in Parliament was always that of an independent member. He obtained a seat in the Legislature at a very early age. Soon after the commencement of his public career, a tour on the continent with Isaac Milner served to deepen the religious impressions of his youth. He became not only a statesman, but a Christian; and he sets an example to the church universal, that whilst he was chiefly anxious for the good of men's souls, he was also ardently desirous for the promotion of their temporal interests. This is remarkably manifested by his heroic, and finally successful, opposition to slavery and the slave trade, which has stereotyped his name upon the page of history.

With the honoured exception of the Society of Friends, whose untiring benevo-

lence has contributed to supply the deficiencies of other religious bodies, most Christians have addressed their efforts of usefulness to the spiritual rather than to the temporal good of mankind; but it would have been far better had all denominations laboured in both these fields. Christianity was intended, not only to prepare for the next world, but to ameliorate the present, and if the religious seem to divest it of this latter characteristic, they conceal from society one of the highest evidences of its Divine origin, namely, its aptitude to reform the existing condition of things. This principle Mr. Wilberforce never seems to have lost sight of, and hence, after he had endeavoured to deliver society from its spiritual thralldom, he proceeded to strike off the fetters of the slave. As, however, we have now to deal with Wilberforce's influence upon the religious condition of this country, we shall not notice the great philanthropic struggle which has made his name immortal, further than to

mention, in passing, that as it was with him "the ruling passion strong in death," and his last words were an expression of thankfulness for its successful accomplishment, so it had excited the earliest efforts of his youthful pen.

The religious, or rather irreligious, condition of the upper classes, called out the Christian regret of Mr. Wilberforce, and although his first public effort for its amelioration was hardly one that would meet with universal approbation at the present day, it affords a sufficient indication of his earnestness and sincerity of purpose. This was the obtaining of a royal proclamation for the suppression of vice and profanity. He then proceeded to organize a Society for the same purpose, visited the bishops in their respective dioceses, in order to obtain their co-operation, and left nothing unattempted that was calculated to promote its object. On one occasion, during the administration of Mr. Perceval, the meeting of Parliament had

been fixed for a Monday ; Wilberforce drew his attention to the amount of Sunday travelling this would occasion, and the minister altered the day. One of the principal efforts of Wilberforce, in his reformation of manners, was directed to the religious observance of the first day of the week, which was grossly neglected at the period when he entered into life ; balls, concerts, card-parties, and other amusements, being common among the higher classes on a Sunday. His exertions had a surprising effect, even upon the great themselves, in causing such proceedings to be discountenanced.

Had Wilberforce been only a reformer of manners, the result of his efforts might have been nothing more than the prevalence of self-righteous formalism. He went, however, beyond externals, and brought the truth of the Gospel home to the hearts of many. In 1797, he published " A Practical View of the prevailing Religious System of professed Christians, in the higher and middle classes

in this country, contrasted with real Christianity." This work had a very large sale; Burke spent his last hours in perusing it, and among other useful results of its publication, was, as is well known, the conversion of the Rev. Legh Richmond. In this wonderful book, the author proceeds, with earnestness and discrimination, to expose all the various errors of worldly society. He begins by contrasting the popular notion of the importance of Christianity with the view given in Scripture of the same subject, and by pointing out the error of supposing that practice is everything without belief, or sincerity enough without enlightenment. He then proceeds to insist upon the absolute corruption of human nature, and to show the danger of neglecting the great doctrines of the atonement, and of the influence of the Holy Spirit. Having disposed of the principal errors of doctrine, he proceeds to show what are the practical requirements of Christianity, exposing, in the first place, the

inconsistency of conforming to a worldly spirit; then, referring to the theory, which would degrade religion into a set of statutes, or disguise its vitality in external actions; shewing the contrariety between a desire for human estimation and the true spirit of practical Christianity; proving the fallacy of trusting to dispositions naturally amiable; and, finally, enlarging upon the neglect of the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel, as the great producing cause of all these mistakes. The remainder of the work is devoted to a review of the intrinsic excellence and consistency of true Christianity; a brief enquiry into the causes of its decline, and practical hints to persons in various conditions of mind, with reference to this all-important subject.

It is impossible to estimate the vast amount of beneficial influence which this work must have had upon the religious condition of the country. Such characters as Wilberforce were undoubtedly the means of preserving the community from those

fearful excesses into which the inhabitants of a neighbouring country fell. In France, the doctrines of the Reformation never made great progress, and the little they did make was suppressed by persecution; the darkness of the middle ages continued to involve society; the clergy, the majority of whom were no better than abandoned infidels, adhered to the system of tyranny, which, as all parties now admit, constituted the government of that period. The laity became as abandoned and unbelieving as their professed instructors; and when they had overthrown the monarchy on account of its despotism, it is not to be wondered at, that they identified religion with the worthlessness of this order of men, and, regarding it as in itself an empty name, ran riot into all the excesses of licentious infidelity. The previous irreligion of France is quite sufficient to account for the atheistic horrors of its first revolution. These, indeed, did not want for sympathy on the English side of the Channel, but feeble

to what it would have been, had the religious condition of England remained as it was a few years before, when the truths of the Gospel were cherished by a comparative minority, and their place had been taken among the more influential by a worthless system of cold, dry, unmeaning ethics, which produced no effect, either upon the life or the character. From a religious catastrophe like that in France, we were saved by such men as Wesley, Whitefield, and Wilberforce, who roused the nation, generally, to a sense of that truth, the glory of which had long been obscured.

Next to the writings of Mr. Wilberforce, those of Miss More had perhaps the largest share in elevating the religious tone of society. The family of Hannah More was comparatively obscure, but the talents of herself and her sisters, introduced them in early life to the highest literary society. Her first productions were of a dramatic kind; but having been brought under the

influence of Gospel truth, she began to consider that she might be far more usefully employed with reference to the well-being of her readers. Her subsequent works were chiefly of a religious character; some addressed to the higher circles, as her treatises upon "The Manners of the Great," "Religion of the Fashionable World," "Practical Piety," and "Christian Morals;" others, as the Cheap Repository Tracts, having reference to the humbler classes. Such tracts were new in those days, and two millions were disposed of during the first year of their publication.

Hannah More and William Wilberforce both lived to see the day when the evangelical spirit they had laboured so earnestly to diffuse, had spread to a vast extent amongst the community. Ere they had left the world, most of the great religious institutions had entered it, of which we speak no more at present, as we purpose to treat of them separately. Many phil-

anthropic efforts, arising from religious motives, had been crowned with complete success. Of these, the abolition of capital punishment for minor offences, the cessation of State lotteries, and the overthrow of slavery in the British dominions, were distinguished examples. A manifest reform in the moral exterior of society had they also witnessed in their time. All seemed tending towards a condition in which the value of the "things unseen and eternal" would be more fully appreciated than before.

The various denominations of Protestant Dissenters had never shared to an equal extent in the apathy which characterized the Established Church before the period of this revival. The ascendancy of the Establishment, however, caused the truth which they preserved to be generally overlooked. But as society became more enlightened, their influence began to operate, and a relaxation of their political and social disabilities having placed them more upon a

footing with other Christians, their field of operation was gradually extended. Great men arose amongst them, whose mental and moral power over the community was quite equal to that of any we have yet named. We have only to mention Robert Hall, to command for his memory the esteem and the admiration of the whole Christian world. In the same communion were those who first roused the missionary spirit among the churches. Perhaps, however, the most striking example of missionary devotion is to be found in another denomination, in the person of John Williams. The apostle of Polynesia, the martyr of Erromanga, are terms which have been most appropriately employed to distinguish such a man. Of his doings we say nothing; they are before the public in his own words; and as the only inscription to the architect of St. Paul's within the cathedral of his creation tells the reader—"If you seek his monument, look around;" so all we say in reference to the

memory of Williams is, if you seek a record of himself, read the book which he has written. In recording the revival and progress of religion in England, we dwell upon the character of such a man as one whom (under the Divine blessing) none but an age of lofty spiritual attainment could have produced. The usefulness of missionaries abroad, however, ought not to cause us to overlook the devotion of those who have laboured as earnestly at home. The name of Elizabeth Fry will occur to every mind as one who, like her Divine Master, "went about doing good," and to whom it will be said, when the Son of man shall come in his glory, "I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." We take the zeal and devoted-

ness of such characters as an index to the earnestness of those by whom they were sustained in their efforts; as a mark which serves to show how much the tide of religious knowledge has risen since the low ebb at which it was found in the last century.

SECTION II.

INSTITUTIONS FOR THE DIFFUSION OF RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE.

“Faith, without works, is dead, being alone.” Such is the declaration of an inspired apostle; and it is remarkably verified in the history of the eighteenth century. During the period of indifference we have already considered, no efforts were made for the diffusion of religious knowledge. This fact is sufficient to prove that the vital principle was wanting. The outward form of faith might be found; but its reality had no existence. The necessary consequence was

inactivity. But when the period of revival commenced, the period of outward exertion commenced also. Men, aroused to a sense of the value of their own souls, and animated by the love to God and man which faith induces, became anxious for the welfare of souls around them. This was the origin of modern missionary exertion.

The age of missions, like every other age, has had its progression. Its first characteristic was the diffusion of the Gospel abroad; the second, the promulgation of its principles at home. Its genius has advanced in this respect. Our fellow-countrymen have the highest claims upon our exertions and our sympathy; and, moreover, to begin from a centre, and to advance outwardly, is the readiest way of promoting the diffusion of any system. The apostles of the Lord were directed to teach all nations, "beginning at Jerusalem;" and from Jerusalem round about unto Illyricum, they preached the unsearchable riches of Christ. The

Christian exertions of modern Britain began in a foreign sphere of operation ; that they are now directed to that within which they ought more properly to have commenced, is a step in the right direction, and so far an indication of advancement. We mean not, however, to depreciate the value of foreign missions ; they should be supported wherever they are to be found : they are among the things to be done, whilst the others are not left undone. But their more brilliant success, in many instances, should never cause us to forget the frequently less promising field of usefulness, afforded by our countrymen in our own land.

The first great religious institution for the diffusion of the Gospel, subsequent to the revival of religion, was the Baptist Missionary Society. This was formed at Kettering, in Northamptonshire, in 1792. Dr. Carey, one of its great promoters, and Mr. Thomas, were the first sent out to labor in the missionary field. Their sphere of operation was

in India. Carey, whose attainments in the Oriental languages were very great, obtained a professorship in the college of Fort William, and the service he rendered to the cause of Christianity, by the translation of the Scriptures into the eastern tongues, was invaluable. Under the superintendence of the missionaries, a printing office was established at Serampore, where the several translations, and other religious works, were printed. The usefulness of this establishment was unparalleled, and its destruction by fire, upon one occasion, called out the most liberal efforts of Christian benevolence for its speedy restoration. The Serampore missionaries more than half sustained themselves; and, considering their usefulness somewhat impeded by directions received from the parent Society at home, they relinquished their connexion with it, and were sustained as a distinct body for eleven years, at the end of which period, the Serampore mission was again united with the Baptist Missionary Society. The parent

stem, meanwhile, produced other important branches. Missions were established under its auspices in the West India islands ; where the devotion of the missionaries, not only to the spiritual welfare, but to the temporal rights of the enslaved, will ever be remembered in the history of emancipation. Such men were Knibb and Burchell, now no more. From the West Indies, the transition was easy to the fatherland of the negro ; and the regions of Africa, as well as other parts of the globe, were added to the previous scenes of this Society's exertions.

The London Missionary Society was founded in the year 1795. The supporters of this institution originally consisted of Christians of several denominations ; they are now to be found principally among the Independents. Dr. Haweis directed the attention of this Society to the islands of the South Pacific Ocean, which, some thirty years before, had been laid open to the scientific world by the discoveries of Captain Cook.

In 1796, twenty-nine missionaries were sent in the ship "Duff" to the island of Tahiti, where a district was ceded to them by the inhabitants, in which they took up their abode. After two years, thirty more set out to join them; upon this occasion, however, the vessel was captured by a privateer, and but few reached their destination. About the same time, the missions in the several islands experienced great opposition from the natives, and upon the occasion of a war in Tahiti, all the missionaries were obliged to leave for New South Wales. On their return, they found that their ministrations, which, for a long time, appeared wholly unavailing, had, under the Divine blessing, been made effectual; and a band of religious enquirers welcomed that return as an opportunity for obtaining further instruction. The truth soon spread throughout Tahiti, and that island became a centre whence the light of the Gospel radiated over the greater part of the South Seas; and in the diffusion of

which to regions before unknown, the unwearied spirit of John Williams became so largely instrumental. Southern Africa was the next spot to which this Society directed its energies, and with this field of labor, we associate the honored names of Campbell and Moffat. The East and West Indies, and more recently China, where Dr. Morrison labored for many years in the translation of the Scriptures, have also been numbered among the vast regions of the missionary operations of this Society.

A Missionary Society, in connexion with the Church of Scotland, was established in 1796. For some time, the principal scene of its labors was the neighbourhood of the Caspian Sea.

The Religious Tract Society was founded in 1799. This institution began with home operations. Its original object was the diffusion of religious knowledge by means of small publications, similar to those which Miss More had introduced in the "Cheap

Repository." Its constitution embraces all denominations. Its income is not derived merely from subscriptions, but from the sale of its publications, which are issued to the public at a higher rate than to subscribers. For some time, these have included not only tracts, and handbills, but books; among which are to be found reprints of standard works in Divinity and Biblical literature. The sphere of the Society's operation has been extended to distant countries, in connexion with missionary and other institutions, by the issue of books and tracts in foreign languages.

This was soon followed by the British and Foreign Bible Society. Up to the close of the last century, the distribution of Bibles in England was conducted by several institutions, but principally by the Christian Knowledge Society, one of those few which existed prior to the period of religious revival. By this association, however, the increasing demand was but imperfectly supplied, and the

want of copies of the Scriptures in Wales was very strongly experienced by the inhabitants of the Principality. In the year 1802, Mr. Charles, a Welsh minister, proposed the organization of a society for supplying this deficiency. The Rev. Joseph Hughes, of Battersea, suggested, as an amendment upon this idea, a plan for the general distribution of the Scriptures; and this he gave to the world, in an address published in 1803, entitled—"The Excellence of the Holy Scriptures an argument for their more general diffusion." In the course of a year, the details of the arrangement were finished, and in 1804, the Society was completely organized. This great institution admitted all religious parties, and adopted, as its fundamental principle, the circulation of the authorized version only, without note or comment. Three secretaries were chosen: one from among the Dissenters, another from the Established Church, and a third from the foreign brethren. The committee consisted

of fifteen Dissenters and as many Churchmen, besides six foreigners, resident in or near London. Not only has this well-known Society sought to furnish every habitation in our own land with a copy of the Scriptures, but it has promoted their translation into a variety of languages, besides establishing auxiliary societies in nearly every country of the civilized world. Its existence also has greatly stimulated the exertions of the Christian Knowledge Society in the diffusion of the Scriptures, the deficiencies of which institution it was established to supply.

The Church Missionary Society was founded about the same period as the Bible Society. It was originally designed for operations in Africa and the East, but it has sent out missionaries to all parts of the world. New Zealand, in particular, has been a very important station of this Society.

The year 1803 witnessed the formation of the Sunday School Union, in order to the encouragement of Sunday School teachers,

the enlargement of existing schools, the establishment of new ones, and for supplying them with the machinery of education. Sunday Schools had been originally established by Robert Raikes, of Gloucester, about the year 1780. The number of children he found idle and misemployed about the streets of that city, on the Lord's-day morning, first suggested the idea of bringing them together for instruction on that day; and to effect this purpose, he had, in the first instance, to pay a trifling sum to the keepers of some dame-schools. The vast utility of Sunday-school teaching it will ever be impossible fully to estimate in this world. As the age advanced, however, it was found that something more than Sunday instruction was required for the mass of the rising community; and in order that they might be trained every day in the necessary acquirements of ordinary life, and that, too, in a spirit of perfect equality between the respective religious denominations, the British

and Foreign School Society commenced its operations in 1808. The schools for the humbler classes which this vast institution has set on foot, have been conducted upon a system of instruction introduced by Dr. Bell, at Madras, in 1789; and practised for some time in England by Joseph Lancaster, a member of the Society of Friends. In 1811, the National School Society was established for a similar purpose, but with a view of imparting religious instruction only in accordance with the principles of the Church of England. Ragged Schools are the characteristics of a still later period.

In 1817, the Wesleyan Missionary Society was founded; but it ought to be stated, to the honour of the Methodists, that they had been engaged in the missionary field long before this time, and before any other denomination of Christians had entered upon it. John Wesley had himself preached the Gospel to the slaves in Georgia. The Wesleyan Missions have been directed, in a great

measure, to the West Indies. In 1818, the Moravian brethren revived their "Society for the furtherance of the Gospel," which had been formed more than seventy years before. The General Baptists originated a successful mission in the East about the same period.

Not only, however, have these foreign missions been originated by various religious denominations, but associations have been more recently formed for the evangelization of our own country and its dependencies, to which we have before alluded in referring to the progressive spirit of these exertions. The Baptists and the Independents have each a Home; a Colonial, and an Irish Society. In addition to these, the Christian Instruction Society and the London City Mission have conveyed religious knowledge to the hearths and homes of those who will not go out to seek the means of improvement. With such associations, district auxiliaries are connected, the operations of which

have been abundantly useful. There is also a Society for propagating Christianity amongst the Jews; and the British and Foreign Sailors' Society, which has for its object the religious and moral improvement of seamen. Other institutions have arisen, not exclusively of a religious character, but connected with the moral progress which religion has impressed upon the times. Of this class are the Anti-Slavery, the Aborigines Protection, the Temperance, and the Peace Societies.

It would be impossible, in the brief space allotted to us, to allude more at large to the history of these efforts of usefulness; but the preceding are some of the institutions by which the present age of Christian activity and exertion is characterized; and which, moreover, with very few exceptions, did not originate until the nineteenth century of the Christian era had begun to dawn upon the world. There are, however, these few exceptions; and to the history of one of them,

and to its claims upon the religious public, we shall now proceed to call the attention of our readers.

SECTION III.

THE BOOK SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE AMONG THE POOR.

WE have completed our review of the revival of religion in the eighteenth century, and the establishment of the great institutions by which it was followed; but we have yet before us the history and progress of an association preceding them all in time, and occupying the same departments of Christian labour, which have, in later times, been more extensively prosecuted. This is the Book Society for Promoting Religious Knowledge among the Poor, founded in the year 1750. That date was the era of Wesley and Whitefield; the beginning only of the great spiritual revolution of the eighteenth century.

There were, at that time, scarcely any organized institutions for the diffusion of religious truth, except the Gospel Propagation and Christian Knowledge Societies; and these had been influenced by the inert spirit of the preceding age: there were no Bible or Tract Societies in existence. Some pious individuals were consequently induced to form this Society, having for its object the distribution of Bibles, Testaments, and other good books, gratuitously amongst the poor, through the medium, especially, of ministers and gentlemen resident in country districts. In this good work there were no party purposes. The Society was so constituted as to engage the co-operation of all who loved God, who were attached to the Protestant religion and its liberties, and wished well to the souls of men. The first meeting of the Book Society was held on the 8th of August, 1750, and consisted of only six individuals—namely, Mr. Benjamin Forfitt, the founder, and his coadjutors, Messrs. Samuel Taylor,

Henry Grew, Henry Cockrell, William Adkins, and Samuel Sheaf.

In the early history of this association, its members, who belonged to various denominations, being few in number, and most harmoniously united in Christian affection, met as one body, once a month, at Haberdashers' Hall, in the city of London, with the use of which they were accommodated by the company to which it belonged. This arrangement continued until the year 1796, when the first permanent committee was formed. The committee is at present composed of the treasurer, the honorary secretaries, and twenty members of various denominations, who are chosen at the annual general meeting, held in the month of May; but all clergymen and ministers belonging to the Society may also attend the meetings of the committee. For nearly fifty years ministers were nominated by the subscribers, to whom grants of books for distribution should be made; and the first grant of this kind was

made to Dr. Doddridge. About 1799, however, the purely gratuitous allotment of books for distribution was discontinued, and at present, nominations of books are granted to the members and subscribers, in proportion to the amount of their respective contributions; besides which, they are allowed to purchase, at a reduced price, books from the Society's list, to any amount.

This institution began, as all religious efforts ought to begin, with home operations; but as opportunities for foreign usefulness occurred, they also were not overlooked. Some of the earlier grants of books were made, not only to subscribers in England and Wales, but to others in Africa, North America, and the West Indies. In 1770, a thousand Welsh Bibles were purchased from the Society for promoting Christian Knowledge, in order to their distribution in the Principality, where, as the events proved, which, thirty years afterwards, led to the formation of the Bible Society, their circu-

lation must have been absolutely indispensable.

The books upon the Society's catalogue for distribution are either copyright, or selected from the most approved works of moral and religious excellence, by whomsoever published. In the regulation of this list, it is a principle (the association bearing no denominational character except that of Protestant), that works of a controversial nature shall not be admitted; and new books are introduced upon being recommended, in writing, by three members of the committee, and approved by the votes of seven-eighths of the members present at a committee meeting convened for the purpose; the same majority being required for the exclusion of any book already in the catalogue. The Society's books, for many years, were issued, through the medium of a bookseller, to subscribers only; but in 1824, a depository was suggested, which, amongst other advantages, afforded all classes the opportunity of pur-

chasing the Society's publications. This was originally established in King's Arms Yard, Coleman-street: it has since been removed to 19, Paternoster Row, where the meetings of the committee and members have of late years been held.

The discontinuance of the purely gratuitous allotment of books for distribution called the attention, in more recent years, of some of the members of the Society, to the establishment of a gratuitous fund, to be separately supported; and since the year 1836, by an alteration then made in one of the rules of the institution, all life subscriptions, donations, and legacies—except where otherwise directed by the donors—have been at liberty to be appropriated, under the direction of the committee, to promote the establishment and extension of congregational, village, and school libraries, either by gratuitous distribution, or sale at reduced prices. The Society has, at various times, received legacies to a considerable amount.

The Rev. Rowland Hill, who was for many years one of its warm supporters, and a member of the committee, left, at his decease, £300 to be appropriated to its funds. This shows how highly that great and good man must have esteemed the usefulness of this institution; and one of the most pleasing circumstances connected with its history, is the number of eminent Christians of various denominations by whom it has been supported.*

In the year 1830, it was stated that the

* In the list of those ministers by whom the Anniversary Sermons have been preached, we find the following distinguished names:—The Revs. Dr. Stennett, Samuel Stennett, Hugh Farmer, George Whitefield, Martin Madan, William Romaine, Henry Venn, John Newton, Rowland Hill, Samuel Medley, Dr. Rees, Dr. Rippon, John Clayton, senr. and junr., Basil Woodd, Dr. Pye Smith, Dr. Collyer, Dr. Waugh, Dr. Winter. Most of these ministers are also to be found on the subscription lists, where we likewise discover the names of Watts Wilkinson, Thornton, Wilberforce, Ebenezer Maitland (some time treasurer to the Society), Broadley Wilson, Sir John Gurney; besides a number of eminent Christians, yet living, and well known in the different circles of the religious world.

Society had, up to that date, distributed upwards of 212,000 bibles and testaments; and in a short account of its history, prefixed to several of the annual reports, the committee make the following statements, which we quote, as briefly conveying the objects and purposes for which the institution was founded :—

“ When ‘ the Society for promoting Religious Knowledge among the poor ’ was first established, it had peculiar claims on the attention and liberality of the Christian world. Its objects and arrangements at once commended themselves to every reflecting mind. It directed its chief attention to the distribution of the Sacred Volume ; and, in connection with this primary and most important department of its labors, it circulated books of various kinds, on the most interesting topics of practical and devotional piety. It exhibited, and still exhibits, an unsectarian and uncontroversial character, aiming exclusively at the promotion of

pure and undefiled religion, on the great principles of evangelical truth. Incalculable benefits have resulted from its establishment. In former years, ministers, and benevolent individuals of all classes, were anxious to avail themselves of the provision which this Society afforded for the gratuitous circulation of the Scriptures, and many of the most useful works of approved authors. The revered names of Doddridge, Hervey, and Thornton, are found on its annals; and the records of their active liberality show how highly they esteemed this important institution."

"Within the last twenty or thirty years, the principle of *the division of labor*, from which immense benefits have been derived to the interests of science, art, and literature, has been most efficiently applied to the movements of Christian benevolence. New societies have sprung up, characterized by the simplicity of their plans, and the moral grandeur of their results. Several of these

institutions have embraced, as their specific and exclusive objects, some of the plans combined in the original constitution of this Society. Bibles and Testaments are now amply provided by the 'British and Foreign Bible Society.' The 'Religious Tract Society' circulates, on a most extended scale, every species of attractive and useful instruction, in reference to the moral and spiritual interests of mankind; and 'Sunday School Societies' provide abundantly for the elementary and progressive instruction of the rising generation, in the lower walks of life. Still there exists a department not adequately occupied, which, it is respectfully submitted, this Society may appropriate, by such a modification of its future arrangements, as will not affect its original constitution. By revising and enlarging its catalogue, it may secure interesting materials for benevolent exertion. It is often found desirable to possess a variety of useful and interesting books on subjects adapted to the different

periods and circumstances of life, from which a selection may be made for gratuitous distribution on particular occasions, or under the impression of peculiar excitements. By a judicious enlargement of the list of publications belonging to the Depository of the Society, and an increased attention, within the limitations of prudence, to their exterior attractions, new inducements may be created, both for the increase of subscriptions, and the wider circulation of the books. Without interfering with the claims of authors, or injuring the legitimate rights of individual booksellers, judicious arrangements might be adopted in reference to all the objects now specified; and it is hoped, that the measures now projecting by the friends of this venerable Society will tend to simplify its operations, revive and augment its energies, and, under the Divine benediction, render it an efficient and a prosperous institution."

As the Society has now arrived at the hundredth year of its existence, it is only to

be expected that, on this auspicious anniversary, it should receive the increased support usually afforded by the religious public to kindred institutions upon similar occasions. Many of the Christian Societies of this country have recently attained their jubilee, and have established special funds on the occasion, to which contributions have been made in a spirit of enlightened liberality. If the termination of fifty years be considered a proper time for the extension of such aid, how much more the completion of a hundred? The centenary ought to receive a double portion to the jubilee, if it were only on the principles of mere arithmetic.

It is but appropriate to the design of this Essay, that we should consider some of the means best calculated to promote the objects this Association has in view. The simplicity, however, of the Society's machinery for usefulness, in itself a high recommendation, renders any lengthened dissertation upon this subject altogether superfluous.

We may be permitted to say at once, that the Book Society requires more members and subscribers to its funds. It will be said, perhaps, that this is the oft-repeated tale of "more money;" and we are far from wishing to give the present Essay anything like a mendicant air; but it should be remembered, that an abundant supply of the circulating medium is absolutely essential to the success of any great undertaking. In return for all monies contributed to this institution, an occasion of doing good is obtained. By means of the contributors, the Society's books are distributed. Every subscriber of one guinea per annum receives yearly, in return, books (of his own selection) from the Society's catalogue, to the amount of one pound at the reduced prices; and each subscriber of half-a-guinea, to the limit of seven shillings and sixpence; besides which, all subscribers have the privilege of purchasing at the Depository, to any extent, on the same reduced terms. To those who have the

opportunity of distributing religious publications among the poor, these advantages ensure a wide field of usefulness. Where, however, this opportunity is not possessed, a subscriber may (as several have done) advantageously relinquish his nomination of books in favour of the Gratuitous Fund for the establishment of village and lending libraries. This fund, we may remark in passing, constitutes a branch of the Society's operations, to which special contributions might appropriately be made on the celebration of its hundredth anniversary.

The Book Society has this distinguishing advantage, that it affords its members the opportunity for making themselves useful in their respective spheres, and thus encourages individual effort for the promulgation of the Gospel. It is to them, therefore, as individuals, that we must especially address our suggestions for the increased usefulness of the Society, that being dependent on the increased usefulness of its

members. To all engaged in distributing religious books, we would earnestly recommend the establishment of a lending system. A book or tract given away, is frequently laid aside to be read at some future time, when that time, like Felix's convenient season, never comes. But a publication left at the door of the poor man's house, to be called for and fetched away within a certain period, possesses a kind of present interest which never attaches to the regular possessions of the family, and is more likely to be perused for that very reason. Moreover, the visit of the distributor affords an opportunity for remarking upon the contents of the book, and thus introducing religious conversation, a means of usefulness the value of which can never be too highly appreciated. The knowledge that their contents will be the subject of enquiry, may also induce the parties visited to read these books the more attentively. The selfsame books and tracts will, upon this system,

circulate from house to house, and diffuse light and knowledge in many habitations, instead of being confined to one, where they might be laid on the shelf as soon as read, if read at all.

Another suggestion we would make to the members of this Society, resident in populous districts, is, that they should each obtain as many subscribers as possible in the same locality, with a view to form an auxiliary society, and to establish a depository for the neighbourhood, on the system followed by the Bible and Tract Societies, where the subscribers should be supplied with the Society's books, on the same principle as at Paternoster Row. Were this system of auxiliaries established throughout the country, the usefulness of the Society would be widely extended. The centenary of its existence would seem an appropriate epoch for the commencement of such a plan.

This Society has very weighty claims upon the support of the Christian public. If there

be anything venerable in antiquity, its prestige surely attaches to an Association which preceded, for many years, nearly all the religious institutions of the present age. When a handful of devoted Christians composed its first meeting, there were no Home Missionary Societies, no London City Mission, no Christian Instruction Society, no Bible Society, no Religious Tract Society. The evangelization of the community was in the hands of a few Christian individuals; and many of those who afterwards proved the most effectual means to the same end were as yet unborn.

The fact that this Society diffuses truth by means of books is another reason why its claims should be regarded as especially important. Books are the most permanent embodiment of knowledge. The sound of the human voice passes away, but truth, recorded upon paper, remains present through the eye to the mind of every beholder. Moreover, the books distributed by this

Association are not merely the results of human attainment; a large proportion are copies of the book of God Himself—the revelation to which we are indebted for all our knowledge of the things unseen and eternal. The knowledge sought to be diffused by the Book Society is religious knowledge, that enlightenment which, as we have endeavoured to show in a former part of this essay, is absolutely essential to every human mind; and its diffusion is sought, not so much in distant countries, although they have not been neglected, as in our own land, amid the spiritual destitution which exists at our very doors, and which has, therefore, unquestionably, the highest claim upon our sympathies and our relief. The parties to whom these are afforded, by the Society's plan of operation, are the poor, the same class to whom the Redeemer himself came to minister—the class most accessible to moral influence, and whose enlightenment invariably leads to that of the higher in the social scale.

But the crowning glory of this institution, and the circumstance which, above others, should obtain for it the support of all denominations of Christians, is its Catholicity; the fact that it admits every Evangelical persuasion, upon the common ground of love to Christ, and to the souls of men. Many have been the organizations for the merely theoretical promotion of Christian union, but they have generally failed to secure the desired object. It is practically working together with our fellow-Christians that will cause us to love them. It is action that develops character, and character must be developed before it can be appreciated. The prayer of the Redeemer was, that his people might be one, that the world might believe the Father had sent Him; and to this day, one of the greatest stumbling-blocks in the way of Christianity, has been the disunion which has prevailed among its professors. Until that disunion is removed, the prayer we have referred to will never be

completely fulfilled. Not that we expect entire unity in the present world; for this world constitutes an imperfect condition, in which we ought each to form individual opinions upon satisfactory evidence, and to hold them strongly; but the conscientious maintenance of our convictions need not lead to that separation of believers from one another to which it has led in the history of Christianity. An uncompromising adherence to that which we consider the mind of God, upon what are called (though improperly) minor questions, ought not to cause separations in communion. But there is a time coming when these distinctions shall be no longer kept up; we have it on the authority of the Saviour himself, that "there shall be one fold, and one shepherd." Nothing is more calculated to hasten this time than the association of Christians, holding different opinions, into one body; striving together, with one mind, for the faith of the Gospel. Such a hallowed union seems a foretaste of

the spirit that will pervade "the general assembly and church of the first-born, who are written in heaven."

We have thus humbly endeavoured, on the occasion of its centenary, to advocate the claims of a Society which deserves to be better known, and more extensively supported. In so doing, we have reflected that these pages may be perused by some to whom the diffusion of religious knowledge among the poor presents a pleasing spectacle of moral and social amelioration, but who may, at the same time, be insensible of its real value, and ignorant, in their own experience, of its spiritual power. To such we would say, in conclusion :—The Bible is not merely a book for the poor man ; it is the inheritance of the whole world. Examine it at once, for time is short, and you know not how much remains to you, and judge whether or not it be, what it professes, a message from the Creator. A candid investigation of its contents, uninfluenced by any of the

systems of men, will leave no doubt upon your own minds but that it is really the word of inspiration. It tells you that you are depraved, and your own conscience will set its seal to the truth of this declaration. It tells you that, because you are depraved, you must suffer ; that if you repent not, you must suffer eternally, and that you cannot save yourself ; but then it sets before you One who is both able and willing to save. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be constrained to love Him ; love the Lord Jesus Christ, and your affection for Him will keep you from disobeying his commandments. Not only will your transgressions be blotted out, but you will be sanctified through the truth, and raised above the evil influences of this present world. You will then be in a position to appreciate the value, and to enter into the spirit, of an association like that which it has been the object of this essay to bring before you. Religious knowledge will appear, as

it really is, the highest knowledge; the supreme interests of mankind you will know to be their spiritual interests; and the great object to be promoted, "The light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ."

"Waft, waft, ye winds, His story,
And you, ye waters, roll,
Till, like a sea of glory,
It spreads from pole to pole;
Till o'er our ransomed nature,
The Lamb for sinners slain—
Redeemer, King, Creator,
In bliss returns to reign."

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